

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 191653

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FOL TEL SENT ACTION STATE, USIA FROM MOSCOW 26 SEP 73
REPEATED TO YOU

QTE C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 11713

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR

SUBJ: ARBATOV DISCUSSES VOA AND U.S. CORRESPONDENTS

REF: MOSCOW 11385

1. SUMMARY: USA INSTITUTE DIRECTOR ARBATOV HOSTED
LUNCHEON FOR USIA DIRECTOR KEOGH AND CHARGE SEPTEMBER 75.
ARBATOV PICKED UP FROM SEPT 19 CONVERSATION (REFTEL).
MAIN THING ON HIS MIND WAS VOA POLICY: HE COMPLAINED
THAT SOME VOA COMMENTARIES, AS OPPOSED TO VOA REPORT-
AGE, TAKE POSITION ON DISSIDENTS WHICH IS DIFFERENT
FROM OFFICIAL U.S. POLICY AND THUS CREATE GRAVE DOBUTS
ON PART OF SOVIET OFFICIALS AS TO WHAT U.S. POLICY REALLY
IS. ARBATOV ALSO DISCUSSED WORK OF U.S. CORRESPONDENTS
IN SOVIET UNION, AND TOUCHED BRIEFLY ON U.S. PUBLIC
COMMENTS ON STRATEGIC WEAPONRY. FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF
CONVERSATION HAS NOT BEEN CLEARED BY DIRECTOR KEOGH.
END SUMMARY.

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2. ARBATOV SAID THAT IN LOOKING AT PRESENT PROSPECTS FOR U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS, ONE OF THINGS WHICH THREATENS TO POSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS IS VOA POLICY. HE SAID HE HAS SPOKEN TO SEVERAL PEOPLE WHO LISTEN TO VOA, INCLUDING THOSE WHOSE JOB IT IS TO DO SO AT STATE COMMITTEE FOR RADIO AND TELEVISION. THEY TELL HIM THAT VOA DEVOTES A LOT OF TIME TO THE DISSIDENTS. MORE IMPORTANT, VOA SOMETIMES CARRIES ITS OWN COMMENTARIES ON DISSIDENTS WHICH TAKE AS POSITION DIFFERENT FROM OFFICIAL POLICY AS SET FORTH BY SECRETARY KISSINGER. (HE REFERRED APPROVINGLY TO THE SECRETARY'S STATEMENTS AT HIS CONFIRMATION HEARINGS.) IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT VOA MIGHT CARRY NEWS REPORTS ON THIS SUBJECT, BUT IT CAUSES GRAVE CONCERN AND CONFUSION ON PART OF SOVIET OFFICIALS TO LEARN THAT OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT RADIO TAKES POSITIONS CONTRARY TO STATED U.S. POLICY ON MATTER OF THIS DELICACY.

3. KEOGH BRIEFLY EXPLAINED THAT VOA SEEKS TO CONVEY NEWS ABOUT THE U.S. AND ABOUT U.S. PUBLIC OPINION, AS EXPRESSED IN SPEECHES AND EDITORIALS, ON TOPICS WHICH ARE OF GREATEST INTEREST IN THE U.S., BUT DOES NOT ITSELF ORIGINATE COMMENT ON MATTERS WHICH ARE PRIMARILY INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF OTHER COUNTRIES. ONE OF OTHER SOVIETS PRESENT MADE POINT THAT OFTEN THE SOVIET LISTENER DOES NOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN REPORTING ON OPINIONS EXPRESSED BY VARIOUS SOURCES AND THE OPINION OF GOVERNMENT RADIO STATION ITSELF. ARBATOV AGREED WITH THIS AS PART OF THE PROBLEM, BUT INSISTED THAT HIS SOURCES TELL HIM THAT SOMETIMES VOA ITSELF HAS ORIGINATED COMMENT ON DISSIDENTS.

4. KEOGH BROUGHT UP TREATMENT OF U.S. JOURNALISTS, NOTING THAT RECENT LEDDINGTON INCIDENT WAS UNFORTUNATE IN MANY RESPECTS, NOT THE LEAST BECAUSE OF THE BAD IMPRESSION IT CREATED IN THE U.S. ARBATOV SHIFTED QUESTION TO BROAD CONTEXT OF WORKING CONDITIONS OF FOREIGN JOURNALISTS AND THEIR ATTITUDES. HE SAID HE HAD NOTED THAT MANY U.S. JOURNALISTS ARRIVE IN MOSCOW SINCERELY INTERESTED IN DOING HONEST JOB OF REPORTING, BUT BEFORE LONG THEY BEGIN TO FOCUS ONLY ON NEGATIVE

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ASPECTS. HE ADDED THAT PART OF REASON FOR THIS IS FRUSTRATION IN NOT HAVING OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP STORIES ALONG MORE POSITIVE LINES, AND SAID THAT HE PERSONALLY HAS LONG URGED SOVIET AUTHORITIES TO DO SOMETHING TO REMEDY LATTER SITUATION. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT IN FACT SOME IMPROVEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE, BUT UNFORTUNATELY U.S. JOURNALISTS CONTINUE AS IN THE PAST TO DEAL ONLY IN NEGATIVE NEWS.

5. ARBATOV RAISED ONE OTHER PROBLEM AS CASTING SHADOWS ON SOVIET READING OF U.S. DETENTE POLICY. HE COMMENTED THAT CERTAIN AMERICANS -- NOT MERELY NEWSPAPER COMMENTATORS BUT OFFICIALS WHO ARE IN POSITION TO KNOW BETTER -- ARE TALKING LOOSELY ABOUT STRATEGIC WEAPONS, USING SCARE STORIES AND ARGUING THE NEED FOR BARGAINING CHIPS. SUCH PUBLIC STATEMENTS CREATE QUESTIONS IN MINDS OF SOVIET OFFICIALS ABOUT U.S. INTENTIONS AND COMMITMENT TO LONG-TERM DETENTE. (COMMENT: THIS SUBJECT WAS RAISED IN PASSING, WITH COMMENT THAT IT WAS NOT OF IMMEDIATE INTEREST TO KEOGH AND THEREFORE NOT A SUBJECT WHICH ARBATOV WANTED TO PURSUE; HE THEN WENT ON TO MAKE PITCH ON VOA DESCRIBED ABOVE. WE ASSUME HE WAS REFLECTING CURRENT SOVIET PRESS AGITATION ABOUT REMARKS BY SECDEF SCHLESINGER ON SOVIET MIRVS AND ABOUT TESTIMONY ON NEW U.S. WEAPONS SYSTEMS.)

6. AT ANOTHER POINT IN CONVERSATION, RESPONDING TO A QUESTION BY THE CHARE ABOUT SPEECH-MAKING AND SPEECH-WRITING AS POLICY-MAKING MECHANISM, ARBATOV VOLUNTEERED COMMENT ON BREZHNEV TASHKENT SPEECH THAT HE WAS IMPRESSED BY THE ATTENTION DEVOTED TO CHINA AND HAPPY TO SEE THAT BREZHNEV HAD PICKED UP CHOU'S COMMENTS ON POSSIBILITY OF NORMALIZING RELATIONS ON BASIS OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE.

7. ALSO ATTENDING LUNCHEON WAS A NEW DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF USA INSTITUTE, VASILY ROMANOVICH SITNIKOV. SITNIKOV TOLD US THAT HIS FOCUS WILL BE "IDEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS," HASTENING TO ADD THAT HE WILL NOT BE SEEKING TO INTENSIFY THE "IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE" BUT MERELY TO STUDY AMERICAN VIEWS ON THIS QUESTION.

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